



Blaine, Camas, Cassia, Gooding, Jerome, Lincoln, Minidoka & Twin Falls counties

## ECONOMIC TRENDS

Unemployment in the Twin Falls-Jerome Small Labor Area bumped up just a tenth of a point to 2.3 percent in December. The increase was comparatively insignificant considering the three-tenths increase in the statewide rate and likely the result of extremely cold temperatures inhibiting construction and other weather-affected sectors. Year over year, the rate was three-quarters of a point below December 2006. The advent of new, permanent employment replacing the seasonal jobs of the past combined with increasing population has had a dramatic impact on the region's jobless picture. This past year was a record buster, particularly compared to previous years. The average annual rates were in a holding pattern between 4.1 percent and 4.3 percent from 2000 through 2004, dropping to 3.7 percent for 2005 and 3 percent for 2006. The average rate for 2007 was 2.4 percent. Idaho once again ranked fourth in the nation for population growth in 2007 with another gain of 2.4 percent. The increase of 35,000 is significant for a smaller-populated state like Idaho and could be compared to adding another town the size of Lewiston in north central Idaho or four more each the size of Burley.

The economy of south central Idaho remained healthy into the winter without the need for a booster shot. Strong agricultural prices and the quality of new jobs in the region resulted in a drop in December unemployment insurance claims year-over-year in four of the eight counties, an extraordinary achievement compared to the 29.4 percent increase in benefits paid out statewide in the same month. Weeks and benefits paid are found in SC Table 1.

## AREA DEVELOPMENTS

### BLAINE COUNTY

- The Sun Valley Resort's golf course will be the site for the snow shoeing and cross country skiing competitions of the 2009 Special Olympics World Winter Games. These events were originally scheduled for Bogus Basin, but organizers ran into space constraints. Up to 3,000 athletes from 85 countries are expected to compete in the games Feb. 6-13, 2009. The economic impact for Idaho is estimated at \$50 million.
- The Idaho Department of Lands has awarded an \$8,700 grant to the city of Ketchum to plant trees under the Community Transportation Enhancement program to aesthetically improve Idaho's transportation corridors.
- The city of Bellevue's new Transportation Master Plan focuses on adding bike paths, crosswalks and sidewalks throughout the city rather than accommodating increased traffic. Safe Routes to Schools, the master plan's initial top priority, is designed to ensure the safety of students. The plan assumes the city's area will double in 20 years due to annexation. The master plan's initiatives are estimated to cost \$32 million.

### CAMAS COUNTY

- A Fifth District judge has thrown out the county's updated zoning ordinance, holding that it was improperly adopted. The ordinance was challenged by Camas County builder George Martin, who owns 180

SC Table 1: Change in unemployment insurance payments and weeks paid, Dec. 2006 compared to Dec. 2007

Area	Weeks Paid	\$ Benefits Paid	Weeks Paid	\$ Benefits Paid	% Change	% Change
	Dec 2007		Dec 2006		# of Weeks	\$ Benefit Paid
State Overall	57,766	\$14,765,223.67	49,113	\$11,409,483.70	17.60%	29.40%
South Central Idaho	5,477	1,351,282.29	6,459	\$1,444,518.30	-15.20%	-6.50%

acres adjacent to the city of Fairfield. The court ruling leaves the county to implement its new comprehensive plan under the old ordinance, which county commissioners called outdated and inadequate to handle anticipated growth. The district court decision, however, is expected to be appealed to the Idaho Supreme Court.

#### GOODING COUNTY

- The campus of the Idaho School for the Deaf and Blind has rented space on its campus to Gooding's first charter school, North Valley Academy. The charter school was recently approved by the Idaho Public Charter School Commission and will serve students kindergarten through eighth grade, using nine of the state school's empty classrooms. The state school has seen its on-campus enrollment decline over the last three years as the emphasis shifts to reaching out regionally to provide education to sensory-deprived students. During the 2006-2007 school year, there were 67 students on the Gooding campus and over 800 in the outreach program. Less than 10 years ago, well over 100 students attended classes on campus. But there is no immediate timetable for determining the future of the Gooding facility.

#### JEROME COUNTY

- Crossroads Pointe, located just off the interstate on U.S. Highway 93, has another new tenant, Magic Valley Subway. This is the eighth store owned by Con and Cindy Paulos of Jerome. They anticipate their ninth store in Shoshone will be completed this spring. Each store averages 10 workers.

#### MINI-CASSIA

- Genesis Grouping Inc., a company that sells dairy harvesting equipment and provides monitoring services to dairies, has purchased a 10,000-square-foot building from the city of Burley for its main office. Consolidation of facilities in Buhl, Jerome and Rupert will allow the company to create a large showroom,

training center and parts inventory. The company has 16 employees but plans to hire more.

- All 1,800 registration slots in the Lions Club's annual Spudman Triathlon were taken in just three minutes this year. The field was increased to allow 200 more participants this year because of the intense interest in the race scheduled for July 26. It includes a 1.5-kilometer swim across the Snake River, a 40-kilometer cycling loop to Declo and back and a 10-kilometer run. Officials estimate the event draws 5,000 visitors to the area.
- A new equestrian therapy arena has been approved by Minidoka County Planning and Zoning Commission in a subdivision north of Rupert. Mental health services provider Pathways wants to provide equine-assisted psychotherapy to patients needing to develop stronger interpersonal relationship skills.
- The Raft River Highway District, which has less funding per mile than any other in Idaho, has gotten \$96,448 as its share of lease payments to the state for state land U.S. Geothermal is using for its geothermal energy plant. The windfall will assist the district in maintaining 271 miles of roads.

#### TWIN FALLS COUNTY

- The College of Southern Idaho will contract with Boise State University to provide a bachelor's degree in social work and two tracks to a master's degree to complement the current associate degree program. The master's program will start in the fall of 2008 with weekend and evening classes. The bachelor's program will offer day classes starting in the fall of 2009. The hourly median wage for social workers last year was \$19.48. The demand for social workers is not high statewide, but there are career advancement opportunities regionally. Currently the degrees can only be obtained by Magic Valley residents on the Boise State or Idaho State University campuses, both more than 100 miles away.

SC Table 2: Twin Falls Housing Sales Data, 2006 Compared to 2007

	New Construction Sales	Existing Home Sales	Overall
Average Price 2006	\$176,726	\$147,523	\$156,188
Average Price 2007	\$200,277	\$158,254	\$168,816
% Change	+13.3%	+7.3%	+8.1%
# of Units 2006	316	749	1,065
# of Units 2007	234	697	931
% Change	-25.9%	-6.9%	-12.6%
\$ Volume 2006	\$55,845,296	\$110,494,753	166,340,049
\$ Volume 2007	\$46,864,926	\$110,303,179	157,168,105
% Change	-16.1%	-.2%	-5.5%

Source: Twin Falls Multiple Listing Service

- The College of Southern Idaho is partnering with St. Luke's Magic Valley Regional Medical Center to secure high-tech patient simulators for use in both the laboratory of the new hospital and the new health science building planned for the college campus. This will make the technology available to all health care professionals in the region. The college is raising \$500,000 for the equipment. At the same time, one of the state's top health care educators, Claudeen Buettner, has retired after 36 years at the school where she ultimately served as chief academic officer and executive vice president. She has been a major force in nursing education and is responsible for the significant expansion of the health care curriculum at the college.
- The media have expounded on the lackluster state of the residential real estate market, but the information provided by the Twin Falls Multiple Listing Service paints a less dismal picture locally as shown in SC Table 2 on page 13. Certainly, price appreciation is continuing, particularly in the new construction sales with an upswing of 13.3 percent from 2006 to

2007. Inventories are dropping, but homes are still sitting on the market longer than in the past so builders are being forced to be patient if they want to see some price appreciation — depending on their individual financial situations. There is definitely a distinction between new construction and existing homes with the volume and value of new home sales falling more sharply. The number of new home sales is typically a smaller portion of the market due to the cost differential. The south central region's median wage typically lags the state and the nation. The value of all home sales dropped 5.5 percent from 2006 while the number of sales was off 12.6 percent. Still, the average price was up 8.1 percent from 2006, something builders would envy in Nevada, Florida or California where the subprime loan debacle has hit the hardest.

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Bannock, Bear Lake, Bingham, Caribou, Franklin, Oneida & Power counties

## ECONOMIC TRENDS

The unemployment rate rose only fractionally from November to December in the Pocatello Metropolitan Statistical Area. The one-tenth of a point bump to 2.8 percent meant only 50 more workers were without jobs in December, primarily because of the temporary lay-offs at Con Agra in Power County. Jobs lost to cold and inclement winter weather in construction and agriculture-related trades were nearly offset by a boost in food manufacturing and government services. This realignment is fairly typical during the winter. It appears local retailers were in line with a national trend this holiday season, holding back on holiday hiring. Unemployment rates for nearly all of the counties in southeastern Idaho remained low and in most cases below a year earlier. See Table 1 for details. The slight increase in Oneida County reflects a reduction in the work force at Hess Pumice. Most of the workers who were laid off are believed to have found jobs but are commuting 30 or 40 miles.

SE Table 1: Southeastern Idaho County Unemployment Rates — December 2007, December 2006

County/Area	Dec 2007	Dec 2006
Bannock	3.30%	2.50%
Bear Lake	2.70%	2.30%
Bingham	3.00%	2.80%
Caribou	3.80%	2.90%
Franklin	2.90%	1.60%
Oneida	2.10%	1.90%
Power	4.50%	5.50%

## *SPECIAL TOPIC — Volunteerism and the Labor Force*

Labor statistics are most often related to the civilian labor force, which includes civilian workers 16 years of age and older not residing in institutions, who are either employed, or unemployed and actively seeking work. But another segment of the American work force which is often overlooked but merits recognition is the volunteer work force. Volunteers work without the expectation of a tangible reward, and Americans have a reputation for volunteer-

## South Central Idaho Data — December 2007

### Twin Falls-Jerome MicSA Labor Force & Employment — Twin Falls and Jerome counties

	Dec 2007*	Nov 2007	Dec 2006	<u>% Change From</u>	
				Last Month	Last Year
INDIVIDUALS BY PLACE OF RESIDENCE					
<i>Seasonally Adjusted</i>					
Civilian Labor Force	49,210	48,570	48,800	1.3	0.8
Unemployment	1,160	1,080	1,470	7.4	-21.1
% of Labor Force Unemployed	2.3	2.2	3.0		
Total Employment	48,050	47,490	47,330	1.2	1.5
<i>Unadjusted</i>					
Civilian Labor Force	49,160	49,370	49,040	-0.4	0.2
Unemployment	1,190	1,000	1,450	19.0	-17.9
% of Labor Force Unemployed	2.4	2.0	3.0		
Total Employment	47,970	48,370	47,590	-0.8	0.8
JOBS BY PLACE OF WORK					
Nonfarm Payroll Jobs**	41,120	41,450	39,740	-0.8	3.5
<i>Goods-Providing Industries</i>	7,780	7,680	6,940	1.3	12.1
Natural Resources & Mining	30	30	30	0.0	0.0
Construction	2,500	2,530	2,320	-1.2	7.8
Manufacturing	5,250	5,120	4,590	2.5	14.4
Food Manufacturing	3,040	2,880	2,480	5.6	22.6
Other Manufacturing	2,210	2,240	2,110	-1.3	4.7
<i>Service-Providing Industries</i>	33,340	33,770	32,800	-1.3	1.6
Trade, Transportation & Utilities	10,720	11,030	10,340	-2.8	3.7
Wholesale Trade	2,000	1,980	1,900	1.0	5.3
Retail Trade	6,180	6,470	6,100	-4.5	1.3
Utilities	140	140	150	0.0	-6.7
Transportation & Warehousing	2,400	2,440	2,190	-1.6	9.6
Information	660	660	640	0.0	3.1
Financial Activities	1,700	1,620	1,750	4.9	-2.9
Professional & Business Services	4,720	4,850	4,950	-2.7	-4.6
Educational & Health Services	5,370	5,410	5,140	-0.7	4.5
Leisure & Hospitality	3,050	3,060	2,950	-0.3	3.4
Other Services	1,340	1,450	1,420	-7.6	-5.6
Government Education	3,410	3,410	3,310	0.0	3.0
Government Administration	2,370	2,280	2,300	3.9	3.0

\*Preliminary Estimate

\*\*Full- or part-time jobs of people who worked for or received wages in the pay period including the 12th of the month